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NEWS

Crawford Memorial chili cook-off raises money for New England Justice for Our Neighbors

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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Olivia Reeve serves up chili during the annual Crawford Memorial United Methodist Chili Cook-off, Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

It was chilly outside with a 100% chance of chili inside at Crawfo
Memorial United Methodist Saturday, as nearly 100 people turned

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try and choose their favorite dish during the 10th annual Chili Cook-off. And it was all for a good cause.

“I love coming here and seeing so many different things and different things to try,” said Dan Johnston.

Alan Anderson, the man behind the event, said typically they have about a dozen entrants, but because they teamed up with Second Congregational Church this year, they had 16 entrants.

“And it’s a wide variety,” he said.

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One of the many offerings of chili offered up during the annual Crawford Memorial United Methodist Chili Cook-off. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

Long tables lined with crockpots flanked the church hall. Volunteers served up chilies that ran the gamut from spicy to mild, white to with beans and without, one with ground turkey, some with sirloin steak

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and one that actually included cherries and peaches. And all of them were free to try.

Linda Simson, a three-time chili cook-off champ (one second and two first places), said the event was free, but tasters were invited to make a donation and in exchange were given tickets in order to vote for their favorite dish.

After bringing home two titles, Simson said she decided to make a chili she knew would lose and it did, yet it was also surprisingly popular.

“The first year I made a white chili with chicken and cream cheese,” she said. “It was thick and mild.”

It was not a classic, she said, but she liked it. Last year, not wanting to win again, she went rogue and made a sweet potato chili.

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Olivia Reeve takes first place in annual Crawford Memorial United Methodist Chili Cook-off. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

“And I won again,” she said, with a laugh.

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This year she went completely off the rails and made a chili that included a cherry and peach salsa and a pumpkin roasting sauce.

“I actually had to send away for two of the ingredients,” she joked. “I had to make it because it was too weird.”

Not so weird that it didn’t have a following, though. Bernadette Higgins went back twice for a taste, calling it her favorite.

“It’s got that sweet and savory taste, sweet and spicy without being like you can’t taste anything,” she said.

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Bernadette Higgins served up a butternut squash chili as one of the many volunteers at the annual Crawford Memorial United Methodist Chili Cook-off on Feb. 8. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

Higgins was serving up a “Yummy Weight Watchers Butternut Squash” chili, but it wasn’t one she had concocted. The cook-off was a bli

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which means volunteers served up chilis that were not their own so no one knew whose chili was whose.

Well almost no one. Johnston said he favored a smoky Tex Mex chili, but he was also partial to another, an America's Test Kitchen chili, because he, in fact, knew who made it.

Six-year-old Teddy Adamson Turpin, too, took two turns around the hall trying every chili before settling on his grandmother's as his favorite. His sister Gabby, 5, however, was all about the Weight Watchers butternut squash chili.

But when the chili powder settled it was Olivia Reeve with her sirloin and no beans chili that took home first place. Judy Stafford with Gramp's Chili came in second and Karen Beals took third for a chili actually made by her husband and son called "Father & Son Chili" that one taster loved "because it doesn't taste like chili."

For a cause

The battle of the chilis was all in good fun and fellowship and also for a good cause.

Simson said all the money raised through ticket sales and donations, which was upwards of $2,500, went to support New England Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON), an organization that provides free, expert legal aid to Massachusetts immigrants seeking humanitarian-based visas, preventing their deportation.

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David Troughton gave cook-off participants an update on New England Justice for Our Neighbors, the organization that benefited from the annual Crawford Memorial United Methodist Chili Cook-off. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

Anderson has been working with JFON for about a decade.

“We’re swamped,” he said when asked how the organization was fairing given the current political climate.

David Troughton, who offered an update on JFON, said one of their programs is called Pathways to Hope.

“It’s a very fitting name,” he said, adding he was not going to get into political issues, “because the focus has always been to provide a sense of hope.”

The Pathways to Hope program offers full representation to unaccompanied minors while the Advice & Advocacy program c

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the work of volunteers and attorneys to serve immigrants across the state with all sorts of issues from visas to homelessness to domestic violence.

Troughten said they are concerned for their clientele given the current political climate and they've seen that concern on their clients faces. Schools and churches once considered safe places are now looking at "what if" scenarios, he said, and trying to figure out the rules and regulations for all immigrants.

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Colin Simson and a host of volunteers served up chili during the annual Crawford Memorial United Methodist Chili Cook-off. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

That said, they are moving forward and always circling back to hope, he said. In 2023, JFON served 189 new clients and continued to work on 103 open cases.

Troughton said they have enough money this year to serve 400-p and the goal to expand to 500.

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"We feel New England JFON is making great strides to move forward," he said.

For more information on JFON, to volunteer or make a donation, visit www.NewEnglandJFON.org.

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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